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SUBJECT: YOUNG GRYZLOV AND PUTINA: LEADING THE FUTURE

REF: ST. PETERSBURG 29

1. (SBU) Summary: Dmitriy Gryzlov , the son of the Russian State Duma Chairman, and Vera Putina, cousin of the Prime Minister, are aiming to reshape youth policies in St. Petersburg by establishing and heading the city's Youth Parliament and Youth Government. Though the St. Petersburg branch of United Russia supports the initiative, non-government affiliated youth movement activists in the city have not yet been convinced to participate, though it is likely many will in the end. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Confirming earlier speculation (reftel), Dmitriy Gryzlov, son of the State Duma Speaker, was elected to be the new chairman of the 60 member St. Petersburg Youth Council. Gryzlov has promised to breathe new life into the Council, which has been inactive since it was established in 2006 to be a consultative body for the city's Legislative Assembly. The Youth Council has also tasked its member Vera Putina, a relative of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (Ms. Putina is purportedly Putin's cousin once removed), to assist in revitalizing the Council. Gryzlov and Putina plan to convert the Youth Council into a St. Petersburg Youth Parliament, which will be headed by Gryzlov. They then plan to establish a St. Petersburg Youth Government, which will be headed by Vera Putina. They hope to have their new organizations up and running as early as September this year.

3. (SBU) Both 29-year-old Gryzlov and 24-year-old Putina are members of the St. Petersburg branch of United Russia. In the city's March elections, Putina was elected a municipal councilor; whereas Gryzlov was unsuccessful in his independent bid. Gryzlov initially blamed his election loss on United Russia's intrigues against him, but he quickly softened his criticisms, and joined United Russia and was put in charge of the branch's Youth Policies Commission. Putina is the editor of a little known periodical "Russia United," which is published by United Russia in St. Petersburg. Gryzlov and Putina claim that they are developing their youth organization projects independently from their powerful relatives.

4. (SBU) Gryzlov and Putina are hoping to make their youth organizations "links between youths and the authorities." They envision that the Youth Parliament will eventually draft legislative suggestions for the City Assembly and even for the State Duma. Gryzlov would also like the Parliament to join the ongoing national anti-corruption campaign and help clean up United Russia's image. Gryzlov has been unhappy with the ineffectiveness of the St. Petersburg branch of the pro-government youth movement "Young Guards of United Russia," and derides its leader and the branch's activities as "jokes." Gryzlov promises to invite all reasonable youth activists, including opposition members, into the Parliament, and he believes that the Parliament would be able to encompass a wide diversity of youth concerns. Putina, for her part, says that in Russia today there are few ways for young people to get organized, unlike in the Soviet era when Komsomol existed. She hopes to fill that gap by fostering the development of various youth associations and clubs in St. Petersburg. At earlier sessions of the Youth Council, Putina urged youth activists to focus on propaganda and to help improve Russia's image abroad.

15. (SBU) St. Petersburg opposition figures are generally very skeptical about Gryzlov and Putina's efforts, and are not rushing to cooperate with the new youth organizations. Andrey Dmitriyev, the leader of St. Petersburg National-Bolsheviks (NBP), refuses to cooperate with Gryzlov's Youth Council because, as Dmitriyev says, the NBP is a serious political party and will not become a "doll for political games." Leader of the local youth branch of Yabloko Aleksandr Gudimov views the new youth organizations as purely decorative and designed solely to offer managerial jobs to pro-government activists. The Communists in both St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast have issued a statement railing against the idea of local youth organizations being led by relatives of major national leaders. A local, normally pro-government analyst has sarcastically suggested that the Youth Parliament should have two chambers, because that way the upper chamber could be run by a nephew of Federation Council Chairman Sergey Mironov. Mikhail Borzykin, the politically engaged leader of the popular rock group "Televisor", views the initiatives as an attempt to restore Komsomol and to ensure the political reliability of youth as was done in Soviet times.

16. (SBU) Comment. Despite their misgivings, the city's parliamentary parties (A Just Russia, the Communists, and the Liberal Democrats) are all likely to eventually send representatives to the Youth Council (or Parliament as the case may be). Yabloko's youth branch, or at least some of its members, might also join if they believe that Gryzlov's organization would give them a chance to legitimately promote their agenda. Within United Russia itself, there will probably be some low-level infighting between various factions as they jockey for position, patronage, and perks if this youth initiative does successfully take off. Overall, the initiative is unlikely to cause any real upheaval in the City's political landscape, either within United Russia or in how various youth-oriented issues are resolved. What this initiative will do, though, is to provide a political base for both Gryzlov Jr. and Putina in the future. End Comment.

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